

# Adult Literacy Contact Centre NEWSLETTER



November 1991

Volume 4, Number 11

A project of the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C.

## New Details Out on Stats Can Study

Statistics Canada has released a comprehensive analysis of its 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA). *Adult Literacy in Canada: Results of a National Study* is a follow-up to the series of three highlight packages which outlined major results of the survey and were released in the spring and summer of 1990.

The survey was designed to assess directly the functional reading, writing and numeracy skills of Canada's adult population. (See sidebar on page 2 for a description of reading skill levels.)

In addition to three chapters of descriptive analyses of the survey highlights, the 101-page document contains 10 chapters of "interpretations from experts in a wide range of fields, including adult education, health, the labour market, workplace literacy and program planning."

The major findings of the original survey are analyzed by such variables as province, age group, migration status, employment and self-assessed skills. The study reports that:

❖ Canadians in the four western provinces have higher reading skill levels than those in the rest

of Canada. 69% of B.C. adults aged 16-69 have level four reading skills. For the other western provinces, the figures are: Manitoba (65%), Saskatchewan (72%), Alberta (71%). This compares to 62% at level four for Canada as a whole.

❖ In a comparison of Canada's three largest metropolitan centres, Vancouver has a higher percentage of level 4 readers (70%) than either Montreal (60%) or Toronto (55%).

❖ Older Canadians are much more likely than younger adults to have literacy problems. Close to 3 out of 4 Canadians aged 16-34 read at level 4. For Canadians aged 55-69, the proportion is 1 in 3.

❖ Among immigrants, reading skills are lowest among those who came to Canada during the last decade with only 36% of them at level 4 and close to 40% at levels 1 and 2.

❖ Less than half the workers in farming and other occupations in the primary sector as well as product fabricating (manufacturing) have level 4 reading skills.

continued on page 2

"Details" from page 1

❖ 54% of level 1 readers and 82% of level 2 readers report being satisfied with their reading and writing skills.

❖ Only 9% of respondents with self-perceived inadequate skills indicated they are currently taking instruction to improve their reading and writing skills in English or French. A further 53% reported that they might someday take such instruction.

❖ Of respondents with perceived [training] needs, 48% prefer a teacher from local school or community college; 20% prefer a volunteer or tutor from a local literacy program; 13% prefer a friend or family member, and 19% indicate no preference.

An example of analysis in the interpretive chapters of the study is this response from Stan Jones, of the Centre for Study of Adult Literacy, Carleton University: *"Some people express surprise and concern when they discover that only about 5% of the respondents felt their [reading] skills to be inadequate since some 7% of the respondents were at level 1 and 9% at level 2. It should be kept in mind that the [Statistics Canada] test does not measure self-judged adequacy, but only the level of skill." "...use of the reading level results to forecast program demand [is] very much likely to over-estimate the real demand, because demand is largely based on an individual's sense of need."*

A British Columbia perspective is provided in the interpretive chapters by "Workplace Literacy: The Results of the LSUDA Survey," by Bert Hawyrsh, Vice-President, Occupational Safety and Health, Council of Forest Industries of B.C. (This September, COFI, in conjunction with the International Woodworkers of America, released a study on the communications skills of B.C. sawmill employees. See the *Adult Literacy Contact Centre Newsletter*, September 1991, page 3.)

In his chapter on workplace literacy, Hawyrsh says that *"...solutions to the problems of literacy are being offered right, left and centre. Our real challenge, before we move too quickly to apply solutions and cures, is to properly understand the problem...we need a needs analysis in order to be able to seek out suitable and appropriate solutions."*

*Adult Literacy in Canada: Results of a National Study* is available from:

Advisory Services  
Statistics Canada Pacific Region  
340 Sinclair Centre  
757 West Hastings Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6C 3C9  
Phone: 666-3691  
Toll-free in B.C.: 1-800-663-1551  
National toll-free order line:  
1-800-267-6677 ☐

## Statistics Canada Reading Skill Levels

**Level 1.** Canadians at this level have difficulty dealing with printed materials. They most likely identify themselves as people who cannot read. (7%)\*

**Level 2.** Canadians at this level can use printed materials for limited purposes only, such as finding a familiar word in a simple text. They would likely recognize themselves as having difficulties with common reading materials. (9%)\*

**Level 3.** Canadians at this level can use reading materials in a variety of situations, provided the material is simple, clearly laid out, and the tasks involved are not too complicated. While these people generally do not see themselves as having significant reading difficulties, they tend to avoid situations requiring reading. (22%)\*

**Level 4.** Canadians at this level meet most everyday reading demands. This is a diverse group which exhibits a wide range of skills. (62%)\*

\* percentage of Canadian adults aged 16-69 at this level

"Liasion" from page 2

Bossort says she will "work with groups, or sponsoring organizations, who are applying for funding for next year to determine how they fit the 1992/1993 guidelines." She says she is "not a trouble-shooter," but she "needs to know what the problems are" so she can make recommendations for improvements.

She invites groups and individuals to call or write her with "ideas or feedback on the application, review, evaluation and monitoring aspects of the program." Also, she suggests communities should "examine their literacy needs now, and conceive of project ideas. Know what your community needs and wants, and be prepared to fill out the application forms when they are available." (Last year, application forms were available by February 1, 1991 and due March 31, 1991.)

For further information contact:

Patty Bossort  
Literacy Cost-Shared Projects Liaison  
5th Floor  
1483 Douglas Street  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8W 3K4  
Phone: 387-6119  
Fax: 387-9142 ☐

## First International Plain Language Conference Set for B.C.

B.C.'s Plain Language Institute has issued a call for papers for an international conference in October 1992 designed to explore plain language issues.

The conference, says Institute Executive Director Philip Knight, will address the needs of British Columbians, but will also be designed to promote awareness of the international

plain language movement.

Delegates to the conference, to be held October 23-24, 1992 at Vancouver's Pan Pacific Hotel, will be drawn from the legal community, education, business and government.

The Plain Language Institute is an incorporated not-for-profit society, which was started in 1990 and is funded by the B.C. Ministry of the Attorney General and the Law Foundation of B.C. Its purpose is to promote the use of plain language in law, government and business in B.C.

The Institute defines plain language as "a process ... that begins by thinking about the

continued on page 4

### Adult Literacy Contact Centre Newsletter

622 - 510 West Hastings Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1L8  
1-800-663-1293 Toll-free in B.C.  
684-0624 Lower Mainland  
684-8520 Facsimile

The Adult Literacy Contact Centre is a project of the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C. and is jointly funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology; and the National Literacy Secretariat.

The Centre welcomes receiving your literacy news by phone, fax or mail. We reserve the right to edit written submissions for the newsletter.

The newsletter is published monthly and distributed on the last working day of the month. It is available free of charge to any individual or agency upon request.



### More Details on 1991/1992 Cost-Shared Projects

A summary of contacts and goals for each of the 1991/1992 literacy cost-shared projects between the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the National Literacy Secretariat is now available from the Adult

Literacy Contact Centre.

The 16-page list, prepared by the MAETT, provides the names of community and college partners (where applicable), a brief description of each project, and contact persons for each of the 43 projects.

"Conference" from page 3

readers of a document. Writers using this process approach their task with a concern to communicate to their readers."

The conference has three major agendas:

- ❖ to develop skills of working in plain language
- ❖ to stimulate and discuss research in the field
- ❖ to promote understanding of the needs of a document's readers, recognizing the special needs of "marginalized" readers in particular

The Institute invites proposals of 200 words on the following topics:

- ❖ the impact of plain language documents
- ❖ characteristics of effective plain language
- ❖ economic benefits of using plain language
- ❖ judicial implications of plain language
- ❖ the sources of legal language
- ❖ competing visions of policy in plain language laws

Proposals should be submitted by January 31, 1992 to:

Philip Knight, Executive Director  
The Plain Language Institute of  
British Columbia  
1500 - 555 West Hastings Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6B 4N6  
Phone: 687-8895  
Fax: 687-0018 ☐

## Two B.C. Weeklies Try "Adult Reader" Feature

The concept of targeting adult new readers through a special feature in the local newspaper has caught on in two northern B.C. communities.

The *Terrace Standard*, a weekly with a circulation of 6,800 (which includes Prince Rupert, Hazelton and Smithers), and *Houston Today*, with a circulation of 1,400, have both instituted "new reader" features during the last three months.

The features were inspired by the Vancouver *Province NewsReader*, a weekly full-page feature designed for beginning adult readers. The *NewsReader* has been a *Province* feature since March 1990.

The *Standard's* feature, called The Start, began about 12 weeks ago, says the paper's editor Rod Link. The Start is a 6-column-width box situated opposite the editorial page on a page with no advertising. It consists of two stories (four to eight sentences in large print, usually accompanied by a photograph) selected from the paper's regular news. A recent story was an explanation of voting procedures for the October provincial election.

Link says he conceived of the idea from his association with staff and tutors at Project Literacy Terrace. He says the concept was "based on the idea that a newspaper should encourage people to read as much as possible," and adds that "more readers means more advertising and a healthier newspaper."

The New Reader feature on the editorial page of *Houston Today* began about six weeks ago inspired by The Start initiative, says the Houston paper's editor Barry Abbott. The New Reader consists of three or four sentences (related to one story from another page of the paper) in large print, inside a four-column-wide box. For example, The New Reader's election issue said: "Page one has a red box on it titled B.C. Election '91. The election is Oct. 17. If you want to vote, you must register. A page one story will tell you how to register...."

The feature is aimed at new adult readers, including those with English as a second language. Abbott says he would like to expand the feature to include two or more stories and a photograph, but is restricted by "time constraints and staff resources."

Both editors say they have received favourable response from their local literacy community but no responses as yet from their wider readership.

☐

"Materials" from page 4

level. Of the four titles, three have Canadian settings (the B.C. Okanagan, Alberta and northern Ontario), and two are by Native writers. According to the reviewers, the material can be used either as part of an English curriculum or as a component of Native studies.

The intention of the *Bulletin* is to review instructional materials which address a wide spectrum of curriculum needs. Materials selected for review must meet the following criteria:

- ❖ currently in print
- ❖ adult oriented and interesting to learners
- ❖ appropriate to the reading level of learners
- ❖ free of race, age and sex bias
- ❖ up-to-date and easy to use
- ❖ designed to encourage meaningful discussion and critical thinking
- ❖ successful with learners

The next issue of the *Bulletin* will focus on family literacy.

The *Bulletin* was mailed in early October to adult basic education and literacy coordinators and instructors in community colleges, the Open College, school districts, and non-profit and native agencies.

Additional copies of all four issues of the *Bulletin* are available from the Contact Centre. The Contact Centre also has available for viewing a complete set of the materials

reviewed in all issues of the *Bulletin*.

As of November, loan of the materials cited in the *Bulletin* is no longer handled by the Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development in Victoria.

However, the materials reviewed in the current issue are now available for borrowing from:

Literacy B.C.  
1128 - 510 West Hastings Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6B 1L8

Phone and Fax: 687-5077 ☐

## *Westcoast Reader Editor Wins Award*

Joan Acosta, editor of the *Westcoast Reader* and English as a second language instructor at Capilano College, has received an award for her work in literacy from the Canadian Association of Journalists. The "special achievement award" was presented to Acosta by CBC Radio broadcaster Vicki Gabereau during the Association's "Women in the Media - Conference 91" on November 9 at the Coast Plaza Hotel in Vancouver. Acosta, who says she was "pleased and honoured" by the award, was one of six recipients nominated by a committee of the women's network of the Association. The *Westcoast Reader* is a free literacy and English as a second

language newspaper currently distributed eight times a year to libraries, multicultural organizations, community programs, and any publicly funded institution working with adult learners. ☐

## "Reading the Signs" on Video

The television adaptation of "Reading the Signs," the play about literacy which toured Canada coast-to-coast as a fundraising and awareness event throughout 1990, is now available on video.

The one-hour show was first broadcast on September 11, 1991 on CBC television. Hosted by World Figure Skating Champion Kurt Browning, the show weaves together songs and scenes from the original play with testimonials from adult learners and tutors. The video is closed-captioned for the hearing impaired. The cost of the VHS tape is \$25.00 (which includes shipping).

To order, contact:

World Literacy of Canada  
692 Coxwell Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4C 3B6  
Phone: (416) 465-4667  
Fax: (416) 465-5303 ☐

## PR "How-To" for Community Groups

The media workshops designed to teach basic public relations skills to local literacy groups as part of the Literacy Public Awareness Campaign Phase 2 will continue early in the new year. The workshops are conducted by Nancy Spooner, Director of Public Relations for McKim Advertising Ltd. (Vancouver).

Workshops are scheduled so far for the following dates and locations:

February 6: Campbell River  
February 7: Victoria  
February 28: Williams Lake

To register, contact:

Linda Mitchell (Member, Advisory Committee,  
Literacy Public Awareness Campaign - Phase 2)  
Literacy B.C.  
1128 - 510 West Hastings Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
Phone/Fax: 687-5077 ☐

## ABE Job Opening in Construction Industry

The B.C. Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council (SkillPlan) is seeking an adult basic education advisor to fill a position funded for up to two years. The role of the advisor will be to assess the ABE requirements of the construction and related industries and provide SkillPlan with current information about ABE policy initiatives and strategy. Send resume by December 5 to:

J.R. Lippert, Executive Director  
British Columbia Construction Industry Skills  
Improvement Council (SkillPlan)  
Suite 404 - 737 Camarvon Street  
New Westminster, B.C.  
V3M 5X1  
Phone: 526-8020  
Fax: 526-8070 ☐

# Message from the Contact Centre

## New Mailing Date Alert

Volume 4 of the *Adult Literacy Contact Centre Newsletter* concludes with this issue. After this month (November 1991) we are re-aligning the date on which we mail out the newsletter so that, starting in the new year, it will be mailed at the beginning of each month. This means that the first publication of the new year will be Volume 5 No 1 in January 1992. The issue that would have been December's will be mailed in early January. Subsequent issues will be mailed during the first week of every month.

Readers with news to contribute to the January newsletter should have their material to us by Thursday, December 12 (as the January issue will be completed by December 20).

The Contact Centre office will be closed for the holidays between December 23 and January 2.

*Season's greetings to all our  
newsletter readers!*

From the Adult Literacy Contact Centre Staff:

**Coordinator:** Linda Hackett

**Information Officer:** Sandy Middleton

**Newsletter Researcher/Reporter:** Nancy Richardson

**Secretary:** Melissa Woodward

\* \* \* \* \*